

FACE Investigation

SUBJECT: 19 year old International Future Farmers of America exchange student dies after crushing injuries following fall from tractor

SUMMARY:

A 19 year old white male international agricultural exchange student was riding on the tractor drawbar between the tractor and the chopper box when he fell to the ground and was run over by the front left wheel of the chopper. The incident occurred in the gravel yard of the farm residence. The day was dry and sunny day. The driver of the tractor called 911 within 1 minute of the incident. Emergency units arrived on the farm and finding no signs of life summoned the coroner who determined that death from crushing injuries was instantaneous. The WI FACE investigator concluded that, in order to prevent similar occurrences, the employer should:

! Develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive written safety program that includes but is not limited to a survey of all work processes and equipment used on the farm.

! Train workers to recognize hazards and train them to use equipment and perform work processes according to written safety guidelines.

INTRODUCTION:

At 1:25 PM on September 9, 1992 a 19 year old Future Farmers of America exchange student riding on the drawbar between a tractor and a chopper box, fell and was runover and crushed. The Wisconsin FACE investigator was notified by the Wisconsin Department of Industry Labor and Human Relations on September 30, 1992. On January 9, 1993 the FACE investigator interviewed the employer by telephone. On February 19, 1993 the FACE investigator met with the employer and his wife at the farm. A death certificate, coroner report, sheriff's report and photographs were obtained.

The farmer (driver of the tractor) had been farming for 15 years, 4 years on the farm where the incident occurred. The farmer identified himself as safety officer and is on the site at all times carrying out multiple duties. He indicated that 0-25% of his time may be devoted to safety issues. There are no written safety rules or policies and there is no training provided to employees. The victim was shown how the farm jobs were to be done by working along with the farmer. The victim was following standard operating procedures at the time of the incident as riding along on the vehicles was done routinely.

INVESTIGATION:

The tractor driver said the victim had ridden without incident during 4 trips to the field the day of the incident. The victim was an exchange student living at the home of the farmer's father who owned a nearby farm. The victim had been working between the two farms for approximately 3 months and had ridden on

tractors and wagons as a passenger at least 40-50 times according to the employer. The victim was not secured in any way, he was standing on the drawbar between the tractor and chopper wagon and was holding onto the upright of the tractor. Just as they were passing the farmhouse, the operator of the tractor heard a yell and looked back and saw the victim fall down behind the left tractor tire. The operator pushed in the clutch and the brakes in an attempt to stop the vehicle. He could not stop before the front wheel of the chopper box ran over the victim's head. The employer told the FACE investigator that he noticed that the victim needed to have instructions repeated many times, he did not grasp things quickly though he understood and spoke English without difficulty. The victim was easily destructible and did not seem to pay attention, he did not seem to grasp the power of the machines on the farm. The vehicles on the farm appeared to be well maintained and were extensively marked with safety warnings. The tractor involved, a John Deer 2640 had rollover protection.

CAUSE OF DEATH: Cause of death: Compression injuries of the brain due to crushing head trauma.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION:

Recommendation #1: Employers should develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive written safety program that includes but is not limited to a survey of all work processes and equipment used on the farm. Use the survey to identify hazards and remove them.

Discussion: In this case, the fall would have been prevented had a safety survey identified riding as a passenger on farm machinery as a hazard and strictly prohibiting this practice. Given that some field jobs are done by more than one person, the employer should identify a safe way to get workers to the fields without riding on farm machinery. A possible solution would include using a truck or other vehicle designed for uneven terrain with appropriate safety seat belts to convey workers to and from the field.

Recommendation #2:

Provide training to workers to help them recognize hazards. Train them to use equipment and perform work processes according to written safety guidelines. This training would strictly forbid anyone other than the driver from riding on machinery. Written guidelines should be made available to workers and reviewed frequently given the diverse activities involved in farm work. Only workers who are able to learn and demonstrate safe work practices should be allowed to work on farms.